

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Maria Dolores Munoz

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Roman Zenz, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments].

[00:00:59.27] SHANNON GREEN: Today is February 7, 2020 at Carondelet Center, with the Mount Saint Mary's CSJ Oral History Project. So, Sister Maria Dolores Munoz, thank you for taking the time today. Would you just start us off by stating your full name and your age?

[00:01:18.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. I'm Sister Maria Dolores Munoz, and I am 89. Next year--or this year is my 90th. [laughs]. I'm not exactly looking forward to it, but--[laughs].

[00:01:35.26] SHANNON GREEN: Good for you. Would you tell us a little about your childhood, where you were born, a little bit about your family background?

[00:01:44.29] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. I was born in East LA [California], and I lived most--until I entered in East Los Angeles. I have--I'm the second of family of ten, but we now are three. So, through the years, we have lost siblings. And then also last year we had two that went to God--my brother Art in May, and my sister Martha in December. So, growing up, it was my parents, who were both immigrants from Mexico, and they came to California. My mother came first, because when she was growing up, she kind of lived between El Paso [Texas] and Ciudad Juárez [Mexico], because my grandfather was a tailor, and he was always looking for a job. So, she was able to study in both countries, which really made her education much better than my father's. My father came when he was nineteen, from Mexico, Aguascalientes. And he went to work in--as a day laborer in the railroad. And so, so to speak, there wasn't very much economic surplus, right? But my mother managed very well. She always managed to get three meals on the table, and she was a genius, really, the way she did it on my father's salary. So, during that time, when I was growing up, I went to public school, which was right across the street. And so, I went there up until--kindergarten to sixth grade, and then when I went into seventh grade, the middle school, it was about ten blocks from home. So--but it was kind of a nice thing to do, because all of our neighbors went there too. [laughs]. So, we had a good time going back and forth.

[00:05:02.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Then, in my seventh year, or let's say, I finished seventh grade, and then my eighth grade, my mother decided that her son, my brother who followed me, was in need of some special help. And so, she thought that the nuns could straighten him out, which wasn't really the case, but that's what she thought. So, she went to inquire in grade school, Lady of Lourdes parish school, run by the Presentation Sisters. When she went, unfortunately, there was no room for my brother, but there happened to be a room for me. [laughs]. So, I studied eighth grade at the parish school. And after that, I went to Conaty [Bishop Conaty High School, Los Angeles]--at that time a Catholic girl's high school. And we had six different communities. But the one that stood out for me--well, first of all, they were my homeroom teachers. And they stood out--just in the relationships that we had--the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet. Although I had had the Presentation Sisters before, it--there wasn't that closeness, you know? So, I really admired the Sisters through the way that they were able to accept and guide and be gentle with all of the students, not just the ones in their homeroom.

[00:07:20.24] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: So, they were very helpful to me, but at that point, I was not really interested in religious life, as such. However, toward the--in my senior year, Sister Sheila McCarthy [(-2011)] asked me if I had ever thought about religious life. And so, I said, yes I had, but the Presentation Sisters had tried to get me interested. [laughs]. In fact, they asked me to participate in their aspirant

program when I was a sophomore. But my mother said, "Not yet--I want you to finish high school, and then you can make any decisions you want with your life." So, I listened to her--in a sense, I wasn't that interested. I was interested, but not that interested. So, then when Sister Sheila asked me, I had to say, well yes I have. But anyway, so she helped me--she guided me through that time for getting ready for the entrance, which was in September. And so, I graduated and then entered on September 15. I look back on that time, and it was like--I don't think I would have been able to do all the things--the preparation things that the Sisters--I think had a long list of what I was supposed to take. Well, I know I could not have done it. But Sister, who was the Superior at the time, was Sister Helen Clarisse [Sister Helen Clarisse Braun]. And so, the two of them helped me to get my things in order and be able to enter with the rest of the group.

[00:10:01.14] SHANNON GREEN: And how many were in your group?

[00:10:06.02] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: We were 43, but one only spent the night. She left the next day. So, obviously she wasn't--she had decided already that that was not for her. And we received the habit--36-- and then several left in the novitiate. So, when we made first vows, we were 29. And then when we made--after five years--because in the meantime, it used to be three years of temporary profession, and then they decided that five years would be better. So, we had to renew our profession every year, the two years that were lacking. So, we came here before they had built--finished building the chapel. So, we had our retreat here, and then we went up to the Mount to the chapel up on the hill for profession. So, that was an adaptation. And I think we were the first group to do that, because later on, there were other groups, but I forget who had the privilege to have--to be the first ones in the chapel. So--

[00:11:48.27] SHANNON GREEN: Could I ask--you mentioned your mother wanted you to wait--

[00:11:53.12] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yes.

[00:11:54.07] SHANNON GREEN: So, when you did decide to enter, how did your parents feel about it, and your siblings--how did they respond?

[00:12:01.22] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, my mother was delighted. My mother had that attitude I want what God wants, and if God's calling her, fine. She was all for it. My father, on the other hand, no. In fact, as far as he was concerned, he didn't want me to leave, and he didn't want me to get married either. I think he was a little possessive. [laughs]. So, anyway--and my brother, my older--three years older than I--when I told him, he said, "Are you crazy?". [laughs]. But that was one of his favorite expressions. So, the rest of them were, I think, too young to even say, except that my sisters, who were closer in age to me, realized that they would have to take over what I had been doing. [laughs]. And it was kind of a role--a substitute mother. When mother wasn't around, it was my charge. When the baby came--new baby came, I knew that my play time would be curtailed. So--and so, my sisters, the ones that followed me--knew that, and so they realized that yes, they were going to have to take over. And they did. So--that was--oh, the last two were born after I left. I entered in September and my brother Joe was born in December. So, that's another indication of my mother. She was pregnant--six months pregnant--and she was willing to let me go. So--and the last one--Chris, was born when I was a second-year novice. So, I never really lived with them, or had the same kind of relationship that I had with the others.

[00:14:44.00] SHANNON GREEN: Did they come visit on Sundays?

[00:14:45.21] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Oh yes. Once a month, Visiting Sunday. And then, I remember my mother bringing little Joe, because he had just--he was just born in December. So, I had been there three months. And then, all of them came at one point. But my brother had already--my oldest brother had already married and gone away. My--the brother that followed me was in the Army, and all of that. And the oldest one, when he was in the Navy, he had a car accident, and he injured his spinal cord. And so, at that time, there was very little that they could do. So, they told them, if you're not better with these treatments, then you just going to have to live with it, which he did. It was about 30-some-odd years that he lived in that condition, quadriplegic. But he was very much the supervisor type. So, in a sense, he didn't suffer that much from his illness, because he was able to get other people to do what he wanted. [laughs]. And he wanted a lot of things. My sisters, every time--he used to live in Mexico--he went down to Mexico. There was a colony of paraplegics and quadriplegics in Guadalajara, and so, every time he came up to visit,

they would cringe, because they knew that he would have them running here and running there. [laughs]. In fact, my mother was his banker. [laughs]. So, he managed--and of course, it did make a difference in his life, but he was able to live through it, because he had that quality, you know. He was able to do what he wanted through other people.

[00:17:42.12] SHANNON GREEN: I wanted to ask you more about your final profession, or those--any other memories you want to share from the novice--your days as a novice, or receiving the habit, the Sister who dressed you, or any of those moments.

[00:17:59.03] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. Actually, Sister Sheila McCarthy, because she had helped me to enter, was the one chosen to dress me. And it was really traumatic for me, in the sense of it got done, I knew that it was going to happen, but the next day I--there was nobody to help me. [laughs]. So, I had to really pay attention to some how do you do this. But anyway, the first--year novitiate--like I said, we were 36 I think--was kind of calm. The second year, more or less--but the more important part was the celebration of profession. So, there really seemed--it wasn't what I had expected. I--when I first entered, it was like my concept of religious life was a cloister, and that wasn't the case. But it was very structured and so, we weren't free--and fancy free, you know? So, it was a surprise to me that it wasn't more like a boarding house. [laughs]. But you get accustomed to whatever is happening. So, that was--relationships with the other novices. I spent two years sitting next to one Sister--Barbara Joseph [Wilson??], and she didn't do any sewing, and we were expected to do sewing. And I did--I loved sewing, so I did most of her work. [laughs]. Plus others. So, it was more that kind of helping out the people who I could help. And these usually had something to do with sewing. So, let me see, what else?

[00:21:22.01] SHANNON GREEN: Did you--what is your baptismal name versus your name in religion?

[00:21:27.14] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: My baptismal name is Virginia. Oh, I forget to tell you--I was a twin. But my sister was stillborn, so I never lived with her outside of the womb. She was Maria, and I was Virginia. Maria was for my grandmother, and Virginia was for my--one of my great aunts. That kind of--I didn't find out very--well I did find out young, because my mother would always--she never held secrets like that. [laughs]. Where that has happened in my family, so I was just one of the group. I was the second child. And like I said, the role of the girl, the oldest girl usually, was to take over the mother's duties when she wasn't around. And we lived with my grandparents--my maternal grandparents. And they were a great help--a great couple. My grandfather was very stern looking, although he really wasn't stern, but very serious. And my grandmother was a free--what do you call--free spirit. And she loved a good time, and she loved to travel. And when she retired, she would take one of us to town, just to look at things--she used to call it "window shopping". And then, we'd go to a movie, and she would take us to Cress's for lunch. So, it was all--but there were so many of us, you know.

[00:24:06.29] SHANNON GREEN: Did you--so was Spanish spoken in your home?

[00:24:09.08] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: We spoke Spanish. My grandparents didn't speak English. My father understood more than he spoke. But my mother did speak good English and good Spanish, because sometimes the Spanish deteriorates. But she kept it--she kept up with her Spanish in spite of the English. In fact, she would go across the street to the school--the adult education for different courses, and she became real good friends with the teacher. So--

[00:24:56.12] SHANNON GREEN: So, can I ask when you entered, and you're a first generation American--Mexican-American, Spanish speaker, did that make you different in the community? Did you feel any sense of difference, or were you fully accepted, or what was that like?

[00:25:12.12] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, let's say there were little things that happened, and little things that--indications of non-acceptance, you know? But nothing really big, although I know that some of the Sisters really felt the rejection, you know? And probably because I didn't--do--let's see--I didn't make a fuss or I was quiet and I--maybe I just didn't notice it--[laughs]--which is a grace in itself, you know? So, I never suffered from it. I--if people--let's say, didn't want to be with me, they never indicated, and especially because--especially in the novitiate, my ability to help out in the sewing was a great gift. So, probably that was the reason for not feeling that rejection. But there was a sense of--not rejection, but

maybe not outright rejection. So, I didn't suffer from it. [laughs].

[00:27:08.24] SHANNON GREEN: So, you studied to be a teacher? You studied education?

[00:27:14.18] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay, yes. When I entered, when I had my interview with Mother Rosemary [Sister Rosemary Lyons (1893-1971)], who was the Provincial at that time, I said, "I don't want to teach." And she said, "Well, we'll see what obedience says." Well, obedience said--they asked us what we wanted to study, and so I said, "I would like to study Home Ec". And so, I studied during the summer after I entered--after we made the first vows, we came up to live here at the Mount. But I only studied the summer and with that in mind. And come September, for the first semester, the Dean had sent me--signed me up for courses in Spanish and courses in History. And I said, "Well, what happened?" [laughs]. Well, they needed Spanish teachers. [laughs]. So, I figure, well, that's part of what Mother Rosemary had told me, we'll see what obedience says. So, I studied to be a Spanish teacher. I didn't--I never did too much with History, my minor. But I did--depending on the needs of the school, I would fill in--I filled in for an English teacher, once for a History teacher, but mostly the Spanish. So, it just--it made me think whatever the congregation--the community needs, well, if I can do it--. At one point, one of the schools, the Principal asked me to teach Math. Well, I said, "No, no." That--I drew a line on that one, because I knew absolutely nothing about Math.

[00:30:09.06] SHANNON GREEN: Did you come to love teaching--being a teacher? Or was it never quite the--

[00:30:15.16] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: --never quite. I did it, but it wasn't my--what I would really like to do. So, when I went to Peru, I did teaching, but when I could move away from that, I was very happy.

[00:30:39.22] SHANNON GREEN: So, tell me about the opportunity to go to Peru--how that came up and how you were able to--I mean, and that's right after Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)], or during Vatican II--

[00:30:49.29] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: It was--I went down in '65, which Vatican II was just finishing.

[00:30:56.25] SHANNON GREEN: So, is that part of--is Vatican II kind of the context? Could you just share about all that was happening there?

[00:31:03.09] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. Vatican II had just finished--it was '65. And by '68 we were changing the habit. We were--it was--in Peru, things went like--you did it, and then you asked permission. [laughs]. To a great extent, you know? We were--started to modify the habit, and then they sent out some regulations. So, I had--well, we wore white, because of the summer heat, but then we kept wearing the white all year, because when we tried to go back to the black, people said, "Well, who died?" [laughs]. And it was--it just was not the--we decided no, just white. So, consequently, I had white habits, and so I dyed the material and made a skirt and blouse, or skirt and little jacket--yellow, and one green. [laughs]. And then, after we'd done that, the directives came out and said black, brown, grey, and blue--navy blue. Okay. So, I had to re-dye--when I dyed the yellow it came out kind of brownish, and then when I dyed the green, it came out a grey. Okay, so it was still within the regulations. But anyway, at that time, we started in '68, but it went on until the Seventies--early Seventies.

[00:33:33.14] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: So, in '71, we got our first candidate to the--Peruvian candidate. And I was asked to be the Formation Director, which again, I had background--no education for that. [laughs]. But, I said, well, that's what they need, okay. So, I would more or less do what I had been--what I had lived through in the novitiate. And then, following--I only lasted one year. I did it for a year, but that's what they needed. But then they named somebody else, because I was living in Arequipa [Peru], and there was a university there with a Theology department. So, Sister Maria Rubina was a student there. But then, it wasn't--it had just started, the university--so, there wasn't too much of a--say, established. So, they moved the novitiate to Lima [Peru], where there was the Confrere--the Conference of Religious, there was the universities, several. Okay. So, and they named somebody else, because I wasn't going to go down to

Lima, because by that time we had moved out of the city and into the rural areas in the mountains. So, then the two--two of the--Sister Maria and I--looked into one section of the mountains, and Teresa Avalos [Sister Teresa Avalos (1934-)] and Maureen Freeman [Sister Maureen Freeman] looked in someplace else. And we then had a meeting, and decided well, we'll go with the area that's run by the Mary Knoll priests. So, that's what we--we chose Mol [Peru] as our--as the mission that we--. And at that time, we got permission to look around and see what the needs were, and it would--not let's say--not to be missioned there if we didn't find it satisfactory. But it was a very good experience.

[00:36:56.08] SHANNON GREEN: What were some of the needs that you saw?

[00:36:58.23] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, education was one. And health was the other. In the health department, there was no doctor. There had been an auxiliary who had had something like eight weeks of training. But he was in charge of what they called the "posta"--which would be like a clinic here, and government-run. And so, that was a very big need, because Maria Rubina was a nurse. She had studied in the military hospital, and she was a good nurse--almost a doctor. [laughs]. And so, I was helping her with the secretarial part of the organization, and--but she felt that she needed somebody in the laboratory to be able to diagnose or give out the medicines. I mean, she knew they had TB, but she couldn't give them the medicines--or she couldn't ask the government unless she had a sputum. Okay, so, guess what? [laughs]. I went down to Chimbote [Peru], and there was a Sister of St. Joseph of Nazareth who ran a lab there, and training. So, myself and two others went down to do that--to learn the very, very basics of the laboratory. And so, we were able to do a sputum analysis. The teacher--the St. Joseph's teacher--supplied us with a microscope and some of the stuff that we needed. So, it--then I did that for two years, until a French group--something about helpers of the Earth--anyway, they all lay people. They had a doctor, a woman doctor, Martina, and then somebody for the lab. So, I was not needed. Then I--for which I was happy, because that wasn't what I was prepared for, but I didn't want to do teaching as such. So, anyway, we figured that teaching in some form would be what the town needed and the campo. It was something like twenty--I don't know--a bunch of communities--I can't remember how many. So, that was in Mol. And that was the time in the Seventies. We went to Mol in '72.

[00:41:04.21] SHANNON GREEN: What--I don't think I asked you why you decided to go to Peru. What was the call or the change of your ministry in that way?

[00:41:13.19] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. Actually, the province did a kind of survey--who could be missioned to Japan and who could be missioned to Peru. And I knew that Japan was not my cup of tea. So, I said, but Peru, I could. I had the Spanish, and it was--I was willing to do whatever the community needed. So, the following maybe like two months later, Sister Josephine [Sister Mary Josephine Feeley (1905-1991)], who was the Provincial, called me and she said, "Do you still want to go to Peru?" So, what could I say? [laughs]. So, I accepted. And that's how I got to Peru.

[00:42:27.04] SHANNON GREEN: Were you excited, or were you scared, or were you--?

[00:42:31.17] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, it wasn't what I expected, and I wasn't really scared, but I was uneasy, what about the new--going into a new situation, because I had been in grade schools and high schools in California, Los Angeles and San Diego. So, preparation for that was, I should get a masters of some kind. So, I went--I was named in '64, but I didn't go down until '65, because I was getting that taken care of. So, I got a masters in Science--a masters of Science in Education--whatever that meant. [laughs]. But they needed somebody to have a masters in--at the university. So, that's what I did. [laughs].

[00:43:53.10] SHANNON GREEN: But it looks like much of your work in Peru was pastoral or catechetical. Could you share about that part of your ministry? There's parish administration, DRE [Director of Religious Education], family catechetics?

[00:44:11.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay.

[00:44:12.06] SHANNON GREEN: How did you go from the lab and the [unintelligible] to pastoral work?

[00:44:18.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. Like I said, the lab only lasted two years. And I was

there six years in Mol, and was doing some catechetical works--we would go out to the communities to do--with the children. But a lot of it was formation for catechist men--a few women--who would then do their preparation for baptism in their communities. So, that was a big thing. And then, I was asked if I would be willing to go to Chimbote. So, I went down to the coast after six years, to Chimbote, where I had studied for lab work. And then I was there three years. And then the bishop decided that he didn't think we were--we would be happy in Chimbote, so he offered us Cosma [Peru]. [laughs]. So, I was there two years in Cosma. There had been a little--as you might imagine--a little bit of conflict with the bishop. And that's where I taught and worked with the catechetical--the family catechetics, which was really a wonderful, wonderful program. I would say a lot of miracles--families that came together, and families that were not in the Church for--some of them were married in the Church. And so, there were a lot of things--and through the children. But the whole concept of the program was that the parents should assume the responsibility for the preparation for their children. So, that's what we did--two years. We started the program in Cosma, and as far as I know it's still going. So, it was a very good experience.

[00:47:18.03] SHANNON GREEN: Did you end up feeling at home in Peru--you were there so--? Tell me about how it felt to be there.

[00:47:25.07] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, let's see. I was there--I went in '65, right? And it was just like--this is where I belong. And so, toward the--I was there 53 years, so the--feeling was more--that's my home, and I would come here to visit--visit my family, visit my province. And at one point very early on, I thought, "This is where I want to die." Well, as the years went by, my last couple of years I went through a discernment, because by that time the vice-province was beginning to diminish. We had had a good number of candidates, but then they would come and go, come and go, you know? But we still have twenty, and only three are from the States. And the three who are responsible, who are the team--the--what is it--the leadership team--are all three Peruvians. So--and then, with the diminishment, not only there, but also in the world, I thought, well, maybe it's a good idea if I go back to my province, because I feel like we're coming into more needs for retirement, more expenses for healthcare, and also the number of people who were able to respond to that help for retirement were getting smaller and smaller. So, I thought, it's probably a good idea to go back to my province, because there I have insurance, I have Medicare, et cetera, which I didn't have in Peru. And it was--getting a little expensive. So, that was part of the discernment. And then there were other indications that made this--that the whole idea of this is where I should be, this is what God wants me to do at this point. So, that's what I did. So, I decided last year--no, not last year, 2018--I decided that that would be my conclusion. So, I came in January of 2019.

[00:51:27.09] SHANNON GREEN: One year, yeah. When you say Peru felt like where you belonged--do you know what we're--maybe this is the same question as what do you miss now--what was it about Peru that was home? Or can you even say, you know?

[00:51:47.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yeah. Well, partly I think, the people, because I had worked with many different kinds of people--mother's clubs, home visiting, et cetera. And the community--that Peruvian community of Sisters, that in 1999 I came back--I went back to Peru after an illness, and I was assigned to be a part of the formation community. And I saw young women from the mountains and other cities--but mostly from the mountains--come and be prepared to be Sisters of St. Joseph. And it was an experience that really touched me, and I formed friendships with a lot of the young women. In fact, one of them is part of the leadership team now. So, it--I would say people would be--. And a different style of living, much slower, not to the--not the "mañana" type, but things got done, but in a different style. So, when Maria Rubina was elected Vice-provincial, I thought to myself--I was here in the States, and they sent me the notice--I thought it would be wonderful if they will let her be herself and not expect her to operate like the States. And to a certain extent I think the North American Sisters were very good at allowing that. So--.

[00:54:29.00] SHANNON GREEN: So, you could see both cultures operating together?

[00:54:33.22] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yes.

[00:54:34.25] SHANNON GREEN: It's very interesting.

[00:54:37.06] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: In fact, when I was responsible for formation, I--we lived in Arequipa [Peru], and there was one Sister who--well, first of all, in Assembly, we had accepted to invite candidates--Peruvian candidates. And so, that was a given. But when it came down to the practical part, this one Sister--I had said we should be speaking Spanish--and everybody knew Spanish--she said to me, well, I have been speaking English all my life. [laughs]. So, it was very difficult for her, and others. So, there was a little bit of a conflict there. But I think the--now--it used to be that we would speak English. As soon as a Peruvian would appear, we'd go into Spanish. And now, it's all Spanish--very little English is spoken.

[00:56:08.22] SHANNON GREEN: So, you've seen this move from missionaries from the States to a more local ownership--[unintelligible].

[00:56:18.20] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Local community. Very much so. Like I said, there's only--let's see--one, two--three that are--Mary Anne Leiniger's [Sister Mary Ann Leininger] going to go back, so she's--she would be the third North American, whereas it used to be all. So, it's been quite a change. But the--and I think when we started moving out of the cities was also a difficult time, because there was no institution. And we had been in military hospital--the nurses were responsible there, not only for different areas but also for the formation. So, they were not willing to work outside of the institutions, so they went back to the province, which was okay. That's what they wanted to do, right? [laughs].

[00:57:54.25] SHANNON GREEN: Would you say you were aware of and/or influenced by the developments in Liberation Theology?

[00:58:06.05] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yes.

[00:58:06.08] SHANNON GREEN: Could you share what your experience of that--how that shaped you?

[00:58:11.00] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Okay. Vatican II finished when I first went. And then in '68 we had the Latin American Bishops' Conference, which was Medellín in Colombia. And that was very, very important in the change--Vatican II yes, but applied I think to Latin America in Medellín. So--but that caused somewhat of a conflict, because again, there were some people who were not willing to change. And the people--for example, we had an assembly and we had invited--Maria Rubina and I had gone to a workshop in Columbia. And we invited an Ecuadorian priest, who was very, very with it in the new developments in--from Medellín. So, we invited him to talk to our group in the Assembly. And he came, and that caused a big clash, in the sense of they didn't think that that was the way to go. Well, little by little, people just fell into it, and so the conflicts were resolved just because people began to study and realize this is for Peru--this is for Latin America. And if they were not willing or able to accept that, then they went home. So, little by little, like I say, there was--but in the beginning, it was a polarization really.

[01:01:00.23] SHANNON GREEN: What are one or two of the ideas from the Medellín--

[01:01:06.06] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: The very--one of the important things was preferential option for the poor. And--but I always thought it's not always the economically poor. But I remember, for example, here, poor rich girls. We had a boarding school in San Diego, and they were poor in the sense of their parents would have nothing to do with them. They were sort of shipped out to--so they wouldn't have to deal with them, because some of them had problems. So, it's that kind of a situation, that I had already felt. But the option for the poor is primarily for the economically poor. But it doesn't exclude the ones who are better off, you know? So, that was a one of the big things. And then studying the Liberation Theology, Gustavo Gutiérrez [Merino OP (1928-), Peruvian philosopher and theologian] was very adamant in you have to change a way of thinking. And I remember once his point was, you cannot reach the level--economic level--of a first world country. It's just not possible. So, it was like--making people look at the reality of where they were and working with that. There's been a lot of progress, really. When I went back in January--just in a year, I was astounded with some of the changes in the homes of the people where I--that I worked with in Canto Chico [Peru]--and I was there eight years. So, there are things happening, but it's not like we can compare--or reach the same level of economic growth, you know? There's a lot of economic growth through exports, which we didn't have in the early days. But there--again, there's not necessarily Peruvian. Agriculture has become a big thing for export. I was talking to a friend who works in a company that they export mangos and avocados--I don't know where--she never told me where. But it's a business

which before they didn't have. But again, I say, it's not necessarily--there are some companies that are Peruvian, but there are many that have the backing of foreign--. So, it's--I don't know--what was the--

[01:05:45.18] SHANNON GREEN: It sounds like you've seen--well, pre-globalization, and globalization offers some economic benefits but probably--but all this in this context of how to uplift--improve the economic reality of the people.

[01:06:04.03] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Again, it's the concept of--if you have economic improvement, your people are going to benefit. And that's not always true. The unemployment is very, very high. And the informal--let's say, situation is--it keeps going, but if you don't have anything else, you've got to go out and sell something to get something for the family. And then, some people have done well in that position, you know? But not everybody. I can see some of the little ladies from the mountains sitting in the corner, with candy or getting on the bus with candy to sell to the passengers. Or if they don't have anything to sell, they're begging. But most of the time, they have something so that people will give them something, you know?

[01:07:35.26] SHANNON GREEN: I interviewed Sister Teresa Avalos, and maybe is Sister Inez also?

[01:07:44.08] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yes. [Faez?? or Telles??]

[01:07:46.18] SHANNON GREEN: --spent time in Peru. So, I wanted to ask you about some things they've mentioned. Were you--was there--the earthquake [May 31, 1970]--were you affected by that?

[01:07:57.16] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: I was in Arequipa and we didn't feel it. But Maria Rubina--we sent her down to the--to Chimbote, because she was a nurse. So, she helped out. And it was a time when there was a tremendous amount of orphan children, just because they had--. One town in the mountains--the northern mountains in Huaraz--where the earthquake hit the hardest--was completely covered over with the mudslide that came. It was incredible. What happened was a piece of the mountain--Huaraz Mountain--fell into the lake and the lake was--went over--and just covered this town--Yungay. And it was a town that was kind of like in a bowl. And that afternoon, the children had been up in the higher part, at a--in a circus. So, they lost their parents because everything was gone there. The only thing that was left were four palm trees. [laughs]. That was--that's the only thing that was left. Everything else was gone. So, they now refer to it as a cemetery. So, there were a lot of children left without their parents. Chimbote suffered a great deal, because of the construction was not that good. But they got a lot of help. But even with the help you--we even had the ship Hope that was anchored there to help out with the casualties.

[01:10:52.02] SHANNON GREEN: Were you also impacted by Shining Path [Partido Comunista del Perú – Sendero Luminoso, revolutionary Communist party in Peru] or the--is there--and you don't have to--but if there is anything you want to share about that time or those experiences?

[01:11:02.25] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, yeah. The places where I was at were rural. And I knew--we all knew that there were Shining Path members. But at the time when I was there, everything was quiet. There wasn't any--and most of the activity was in the jungle. But you get a feeling--and the Maryknoll priests had a radio connection with all the parishes. And so, we got to the point where there was a code for everything. [laughs]. And so, there builds up a feeling--uncertainty--and in some cases, I knew who the Shining Path members were, but there was no--overt behavior. So--except that we didn't have any electricity in the town, so they would gather up the young--mostly the young men--in the plaza, and they would indoctrinate them. And we could really tell when somebody was catching on to the Sendero, no? So--for me, it was knowing who they were or even if I didn't know exactly who they were, that feeling of uncertainty--that feeling--but I never went through any overt occasion like Inez and some of the others--Celia DuRea [Sister Celia DuRea]. So--but I just knew that they were capable of doing all kinds of terrible things. But then, you had the Sendero on one side, and then you had the Army on the other. So, the poor people were caught in the middle. And in some cases, the Army was worse than Sendero. But I never experienced that directly. It was more--this is the news, you know. But I knew that they--and even today, I know that they still exist--in the jungle especially. Periodically they flare up. But they've been able to control them. But it's not over--the mentality. And part of it is because the needs--and their whole propaganda was we're for the people, but if the people didn't agree with them, off with their heads, no? In that sense, no? So, it--but again

I say, I didn't experience any real danger from them, except through that knowledge that they were there.

[01:15:26.27] SHANNON GREEN: Do you have another joy or a story or something else from that time that you'd like to share with us. It seems to me you are Peruvian--this was your home and your life, you know? What else from that time or what you did there would you like us to know?

[01:15:46.22] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, I really enjoyed, like I told you before, I really enjoyed the people. And to be with the people and to experience their joy, their celebration, did a lot for me. They could be celebrating even though they had terrible, terrible things happening in their families, no? But they were able to put that aside, at least for a while, and just enjoy. So, in a sense, I think I have learned a lot from them, in that ability and I know that the differences in values also has had a big impact on that particular topic. They would save for a year, for two years, and then offer to be the majordomo of a fiesta. In Mol it was September 13, 14, and 15th--and just splurge. Everybody was invited--nobody was left without food. Usually that's what it amounted to--sharing food is a big, big thing in Peru. You hardly ever go to a meeting without food. Sometimes, it's shared--they bring something, but not always. It depends on the host, you know? That brought me a lot of joy to watch these people enjoy. Although, part of the "enjoy" was the drinking, which was not my cup of tea. So, if you didn't get drunk, it wasn't a good fiesta. You were not--you didn't supply--and that was criticized. But for the most part, I could see when we went to Mol, one of the things was to educate them why they're having the fiesta. Because they would say--they would celebrate the Cross in May. A lot of the communities celebrated that, but they didn't know why. They would celebrate St. Francis or one of the other saints, but they didn't even know who he was. So, a lot of the work was to educate the people there. Why do you celebrate, no? And in some cases, they'd celebrate anything.

[01:20:17.03] SHANNON GREEN: Why not celebrate?

[01:20:21.11] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Yeah. [laughs].

[01:20:23.18] SHANNON GREEN: In your time as a Sister of St. Joseph, were you actively formed in the language around the charism and the history, Le Puy [France], and "the neighbor"--does that come into your thinking about your time in your ministry? And could you just share about where you connect with the charism?

[01:20:46.28] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, I think the charism is relationship to the people, for the most part. The acceptance, no matter who they were--if they were poor or if they were rich--it didn't make any difference. And in the sense of, they were expected to respect, you know? There would be the charism of the Sisters I think, and it kind of fell in with the--I think--the way people were. People were very conscious of relationships, although sometimes those relationships were very--were broken very easily, no? Some of the--ways in which people related were--some people call them superficial. It's--that's what you're supposed to do, and so that's how you would talk. But the sincerity was missing. But I think you find that anyplace, no? So, it's not necessarily--although some people will say that that's the way they are--well, I don't think so. You have to get to know them and then it makes a difference. But their acceptance and the relationships that you can make, it's really incredible.

[01:23:13.19] SHANNON GREEN: Can I ask you, when you lived in Peru, what would you do for fun? How would you relax?

[01:23:19.00] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: We very often took a drive into town. At the time I was in Mol, we didn't have any electricity, so, if we wanted to buy--if we wanted to have chicken for dinner, we had to go and buy it in--at least three hours drive to buy all that kind of stuff. So, now, things have changed. They've gotten electricity, so people can bring food in and be able to sell that in town. Whereas when I was there, it was not possible. If we didn't want to drive there, there was a bus, but this bus left at two o'clock in the morning. And if you wanted to come back the same day, it was possible, because we would leave at two o'clock in the morning, probably get to Juliaca [Peru] around six--five-thirty, six--and your feet would feel like they were blocks of ice, but you'd buy yourself a drink. Very good is quinoa with apples--it was nutritious and it warmed you up. So, those were some of the hardships. But we would sometimes drive into town and just spend the night there, go to a movie, visit people or something like that. When I lived in Cuzco, a couple of times we went into Cuzco itself, the city--because we didn't live in the city--and participated in some of

the traditional folkloric events like Inti Raymi [ancient Inca Festival of the Sun celebrating the Winter Solstice], which was in June--June 24 is the big day. And they'd celebrate with dances and contests--dance contests, things like that. So, that was a outing that we enjoyed a lot. So--

[01:26:45.18] SHANNON GREEN: Have you experienced culture shock or something similar? Has it been difficult adjustment back here in Los Angeles, given all your years--any time you went back and forth, or now?

[01:26:59.11] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, they say--when I first went to Peru, I thought I knew Spanish, but I knew Mexican Spanish, which is not necessarily Peruvian Spanish. So, I made a lot of mistakes in vocabulary mostly. So, it's this kind of situation, no? So, it kind of--how do I put it--makes it--makes one feel like they're out of it, no? They're not really in--understanding, no? But as the days go by, and the months and the years, you get into a rhythm of their kind of Spanish, as compared to what you were used to. So then--what else can I say about that?

[01:28:35.02] SHANNON GREEN: What was I going to ask about? Just if there was anything else--look at my list--I've just been--we asked you about your joys, about you know your religious life. I actually would love to know what would you like your Sisters or any of us to know about Peru, the missions in Peru, the Sisters in Peru--what do you want us to know? If you could just know this thing that you would share with us?

[01:29:13.19] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, what I said about people I think is a very important thing. And not to expect things like in the States. Because that was one of the problems that people had. So, I accept a difference and let's say enjoy the difference, no? I think that's important to know, because you could see that in tourists. Tourists will go to Peru and expect all the comforts and the things that are not possible in Peru. The five-star hotels, there are some, but for the most part, it's a different category, no? So, in general I would say, know that it's going to be different, and accept that difference joyfully, you know? Not--"I will live through this but I don't like it."

[01:31:02.08] SHANNON GREEN: Was there anything else that you thought about that you wanted to share in this time?

[01:31:08.10] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Well, let's see--there were some--a bunch of things in the questionnaire--questions. One of them was, how--what would you say to students?

[01:31:37.06] SHANNON GREEN: Please.

[01:31:38.24] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: And I think anybody going to the Mount or thinking of going to the Mount should know that it's a very good option. The Mount has tradition of good education, and it's not just the studies, but it's an overall experience of student life, you know? It's--if they can enter into life in--at the Mount with the--a mentality that they are going to receive a wonderful education, but they can also have many other opportunities. And the opportunities, I think, can make the difference in the way they study.

[01:33:07.05] SHANNON GREEN: Was there something you heard this morning from the President that made you proud, or you were excited about?

[01:33:18.17] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: Wonderful. I mean--

[01:33:22.00] [Director's comments.]

[01:33:37.29] SISTER MARIA DOLORES MUNOZ: It's really--let's see, what's the word--overwhelming, the things that the Mount is doing to capture--re-capture the charism, the essence of the people who started the university, no? There are--and it seems like they're really about the only ones--or very few--who are doing that kind of study and that kind of emphasis. And it's just--it's so wonderful to hear, especially teachers, who have been able to communicate this charism. Not to say that that charism doesn't exist any place else, but it's passed on through people and maybe you don't even know it. It's something that you are and it's--it makes a--it makes people see where you're coming from and enjoy the feeling, no? Because there's a lot of

emotion there--I really appreciated that talk, and especially that video was excellent. You've done a wonderful job.

[01:36:04.29] SHANNON GREEN: Thank you. Anything else you'd like to share?

[01:36:10.19] [Director's comments.]

[01:36:36.07] [End of interview.]

Interview Index

Project: Mount Saint Mary's University (MSMU)--CSJ Oral History Project

Interview Date: 02/07/2020

Interviewee: Sister Maria Dolores Munoz

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Roman Zenz, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University; Mary Trunk, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University

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Transcription Date: 03/19/2020

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

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[00:05:02.28] Entering Catholic education.

[00:07:20.24] Decision to enter religious life. Sister Sheila McCarthy [(-2011)].

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